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AUTHOR	Trent, Faith
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ABSTRACT

Focus groups examined issues of school retention and achievement among male high school students in South Australia. The study was undertaken in light of declining high school graduation rates among boys, particularly in rural areas. Focus groups were conducted with 1,800 boys in years 9, 11, and 12; 60 school representatives were interviewed; and a questionnaire based on responses was administered to another 200 students. Findings indicate that adolescent males don't like school and feel that declining rates of achievement and retention are inevitable. Adults don't ask young people what they think and they certainly don't ask in a way that establishes trust and mutual respect. Adults don't listen, and they don't really want to know, particularly if substantial changes would be required on their part. Another strongly held, recurring theme was that school expects adult behavior but doesn't deliver an adult environment. Most boys didn't value school because it was boring, repetitive, and irrelevant. School doesn't offer what most boys want--courses that prepare them for a job. School pushes the rhetoric of fairness, justice, respect, flexibility, and celebration of difference but produces the opposite in practice. School pushes boys into a downward spiral of disaffection, resistance, resentment, anger, and retaliation that is hard to stop. There are many bad teachers who have too much power. Good teachers listen to, respect, trust, and value their students. That a good teacher changes everything was uniformly repeated. Implications for teacher education are discussed. An appendix presents the student questionnaire. A data table presents year 12 completion rates for Australian boys and girls in urban, rural, and remote areas, 1984-98. (TD)

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Aliens in the classroom?

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Faith Trent
(Flinders University)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Abstract

Evidence from a recent research project looking at Adolescent Males' Perceptions of Schooling, Retention and Achievement indicates that there is quite radical rethinking required in terms of schooling meeting the needs of adolescent males. In a sense, the difference between school culture and the wider Australian culture, new learning styles, access to information and the impact of ICT, and student lifestyles all have contributed to there being 'Aliens in the Classroom.'

Learning to live and work with these students means that we need to examine what good teaching is for them, as well as for ourselves, whether our educational structures assist or block achievement of their goals and how we respond so that their level of resistance and despair is reduced.

This presentation takes the view that we need to stop 'fixing up the boys', labelling them as failures and setting our goals for them, and instead look at how the behaviour of schools and the messages they impart enhance or restrict student success.

The education of boys is big news, or perhaps it is the resulting outcomes of the educative process which make us uncomfortable as a society. This is evidenced by the number of press clippings which talk about what is happening to boys in schools. Even the Prime Minister has entered the fray by stating on 15th June that "Australia needed to focus on the educational needs of boys to tackle their widespread disenchantment with school." (Melbourne Age, p. A4)

The Prime Minister is not known for the many statements he makes about education. So why this one? Perhaps the statistical representation, as well as the screaming headlines have attracted his attention. In its submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry on the Education of Boys, the Department of Education ,Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA, 2000, p. 18) produced some revealing statistics.

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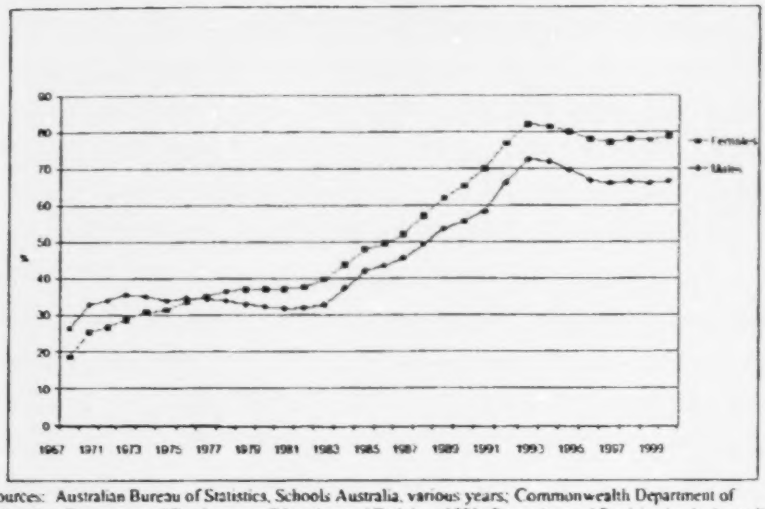


Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia, various years; Commonwealth Department of Education; Department of Employment, Education and Training (1991) Retention and Participation in Australian Schools, 1967 to 1990, AGPS, Canberra.

Figure 1: Apparent retention rates from the commencement of secondary schooling to Year 12 (%) 1967-1999

These data indicate that retention rates at school peaked in 1992, that the retention rate for girls in Australia has been higher than for boys since 1977 and that the gap between retention rates is growing. Early suggestions that it was those in the low socio-economic group who were leaving and taking up non-professional jobs predominated what discussion there was, followed by a realisation that these jobs were vanishing (although not as fast as some would suppose). However, post 1992, it was impossible to maintain this fiction as more and more boys across the socio-economic spectrum did not complete year 12. Somewhat cynically, I would suggest that when the children of the powerbrokers began to walk away from education, there was deemed to be a 'crisis'.

There are obviously still differences in the numbers of students who choose to leave school early in high and low socio-economic areas and in State and private schools, but the phenomenon exists across all groups in all locations. It is clear, however, that as the DETYA statistics show, there is a higher rate of non-completion in rural areas than in urban. This too is not a new development but understanding its impact is important. The following tables show the extent of the difference.

Table 1: Year 12 completions by urban, rural and remote location and gender 1984-1998

	Urban			Rural			Remote			Total		
Year	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
1984	43	49	46	32	43	38	27	40	33	N/A	N/A	N/A
1985	45	51	47	35	46	40	31	40	36	41	49	45
1987	53	62	58	46	60	53	38	50	44	50	61	56
1988	56	66	61	50	64	57	41	55	48	53	65	59
1989	56	67	62	51	66	58	451	53	47	54	66	60
1990	57	68	63	52	68	60	41	54	47	55	68	61
1991	66	77	71	61	76	68	50	64	57	63	75	69
1992	65	74	70	61	74	67	52	65	58	64	74	69
1993	66	76	71	60	74	67	54	64	58	64	75	69
1994	66	76	71	57	71	64	51	65	58	63	74	68
1995	64	75	69	54	70	62	46	59	52	61	73	67
1996	62	72	67	55	72	63	46	65	55	59	71	65
1997r	61	71	66	54	70	62	43	62	51	58	71	64
1998	62	73	67	55	71	63	48	61	54	60	72	66

Notes: (R)=revised

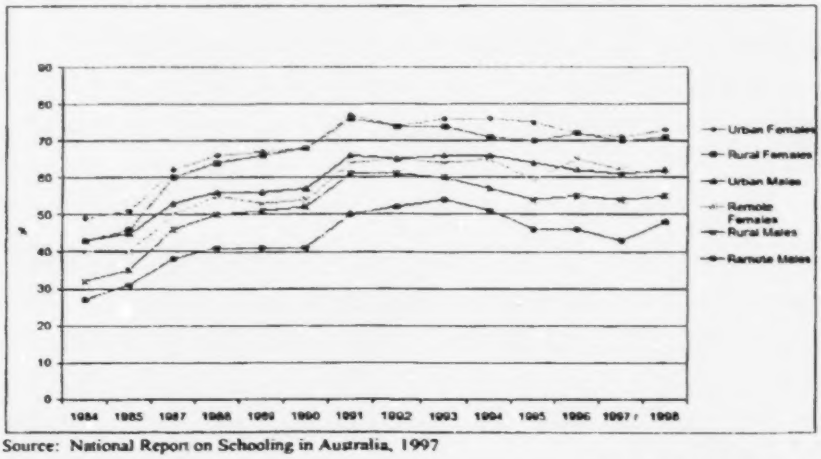
(a) These figures are estimates only. They express the number of Year 12 completions (Year 12 certificates issued by state and education authorities) as a proportion of the estimated population that could attend Year 12 in that calendar year.

(b) Definitions of urban, rural and remote in this table are based on Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas Classification (1995) developed by the DPIE. Urban includes Darwin, Townsville/Thuringowa and Queanbeyan.

(c) Remote comprised approximately three per cent of the 15-19 year old population in 1998 and, as a result, relatively small changes in the estimated resident population or in the number of completions annually can lead to apparently substantial changes

Source: As in Statistical Annex (National Schooling Report), 1991 – revised figures from earlier reports and the ABS

The data can be more clearly represented as in the following graph, which illustrates that two factors, gender and location, appear to influence decisions made about schooling by students in general and boys in particular. (DETYA, 2000, p. 48)



Source: National Report on Schooling in Australia, 1997

(DETYA:2000, p. 49)

Figure 2: Year 12 completion rates by locality and gender, 1984 to 1998 (%)

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The differences are quite startling- in 1998, over 70% of rural girls completed year 12, as compared with 55% of rural boys and fewer than 50% of remote boys. There are obviously a multiplicity of reasons for this, and for those of you who are involved in rural settings, you can provide better explanations than me. However, we were struck in our work with how the boys in country towns being fewer in numbers in later years, can make comparisons about life choices and how the pressures on boys who remain at school in rural areas may be more severe than for their urban counterparts.

Finally, in the same submission, DETYA goes on to state that

> *Leaving school before completing year 12 is of concern because of the high correlation between completing high school and achieving successful labour market outcomes.* (DETYA, 2000, 11)

In the current environment it is not surprising, perhaps, that jobs and labour markets are the focus of the rhetoric but for me there are a number of accompanying issues which are equally worthy of attention. These centre on what is happening to the boys themselves, how they feel about education and how valued they feel. Currently, Australia has the highest rate of young male suicide per capita in the world and there is a level of disillusionment and despair which must be of concern. Given the proportion of time students spend in school, we need to ensure that it plays a positive role in their lives and not a negative one. Issues of school retention and achievement for boys, as well as girls, and the reasons for the choices they make therefore are critically important.

We at Flinders University were funded by DETYA to talk to young males between the ages of 16-18 about schooling, retention and achievement. In the end we spoke to 1 800 year 9,11 and 12 students in urban and rural settings and in State, Catholic and Independent schools in South Australia. We also spoke to representatives of 60 schools who came to a number of workshops to say what they were doing and to hear about our results. We used a methodology which employed focus groups of 10 students, including students educationally at risk and those who spanned the achievement range, including high achievers. At a later stage we designed a questionnaire based on the responses of the boys and used this with 200 other girls and boys. The questionnaire is found in Appendix 1.

From the information gained from the workshops undertaken with teachers and principals, there is no doubt that a number of strategies are being employed in schools. Varieties of programs have been suggested and implemented which deal with masculinity, comparisons of the retention rates , achievement or non-achievement of boys with girls, the lack of male teachers in classrooms and the apparent need for appropriate role models. To date there is little evidence of the level of success of these programs. They generally reflect the fact that the voices of academics, of teachers and principals, of the media and of parents have been heard but until relatively recently there had been no voices of the boys. This is changing with studies reported by Yates (1998), SSABSA (1999), Rowe (2000) and Kenway (2000) among others. We found that many of the programs had been designed without consultation with the boys and with a view to 'fixing the boys up' by giving them what it was felt they needed. When the boys were interviewed it became clear that in the majority of cases, the programs either had little impact or were resented by them. It would seem sensible then to listen to what they had to say and then jointly to decide what is the best way forward. This does not imply that there will not be differences of opinion or perspective, but the boys, as we all do, will act on their own perceptions, particularly if we are not prepared to listen and value their opinions. So what were their opinions?

Our research revealed a broad range of interconnected factors that adolescent males believe make schooling a process they don't like, don't value and that they cannot change *"because nobody's listening"*. It has been evident from the outset that most boys are clear and uniform in their perspective of the issues and problems in years 9-12 and in their general view declining rates of achievement and retention are inevitable because the adult world is *"not listening"* and "*not genuinely interested"* in their views, their well-being and, for many, their educational needs and outcomes. As they told us:

> *They don't want to listen. They make the rules. There is always an excuse.* (Year 9-11)

> *They always make things sound the way they want ... what they want sound best. Ya don't stand a chance.* (Year 11)

Furthermore, the boys have obviously thought about their educational experience often and at length, and have well-formed views about a range of factors that continue

to shape and direct their achievement and their ability or preparedness to remain at school.

Although the boys are not familiar with the literature, most of them have seen or heard achievement and retention issues discussed in the media. From what they have said, it is clear that they regard the views of the adult world, on these matters, to simplify matters to the point of being wrong. They believe that adults don't ask young people what they think and that they certainly don't ask in a way that establishes trust and mutual respect; they don't listen, and they don't really want to know, particularly if it requires or necessitates substantial changes on their part.

Even though a good deal of what the boys have said differs from the views expressed in much of the literature, the media, and what passes as 'common sense', these differences will not be critically examined at length in this paper In no sense are the responses 'right' or 'wrong' but they do represent their reality which informs the decisions about achievement and retention the boys make.

The boys identified a range of interconnected factors which influence their decision making and perceptions about schooling and their place in it, emphasising the following:

- the adult world is not listening, or not genuinely listening; and
- school expects adult behaviour but doesn't deliver an adult environment.

These themes recurred throughout the interviews, and were strongly held. Given that 80% of the boys are working up to 20 hours per week in what is considered by society to be an adult environment, they have a mechanism for comparison.

The views they expressed to us are reinforced by a study undertaken by the SSABSA in 1999, whose results show two important things: the differences between the perception of staff and students; and the almost complete lack of self analysis undertaken by the staff, with a view of the boys' being responsible for their dilemma.

The responses of students and staff in the SSABSA study are graphed below. The lack of correlation between the ascribed reasons for students in senior secondary schools

failing to complete year 12, shows a very different world view. At a time where, as part of the Knowledge Nation statement, Kym Beasley has pledged to have year 12 completions at 90%, it would seem important to understand why students are leaving school, from their point of view as well as from the official point of view.

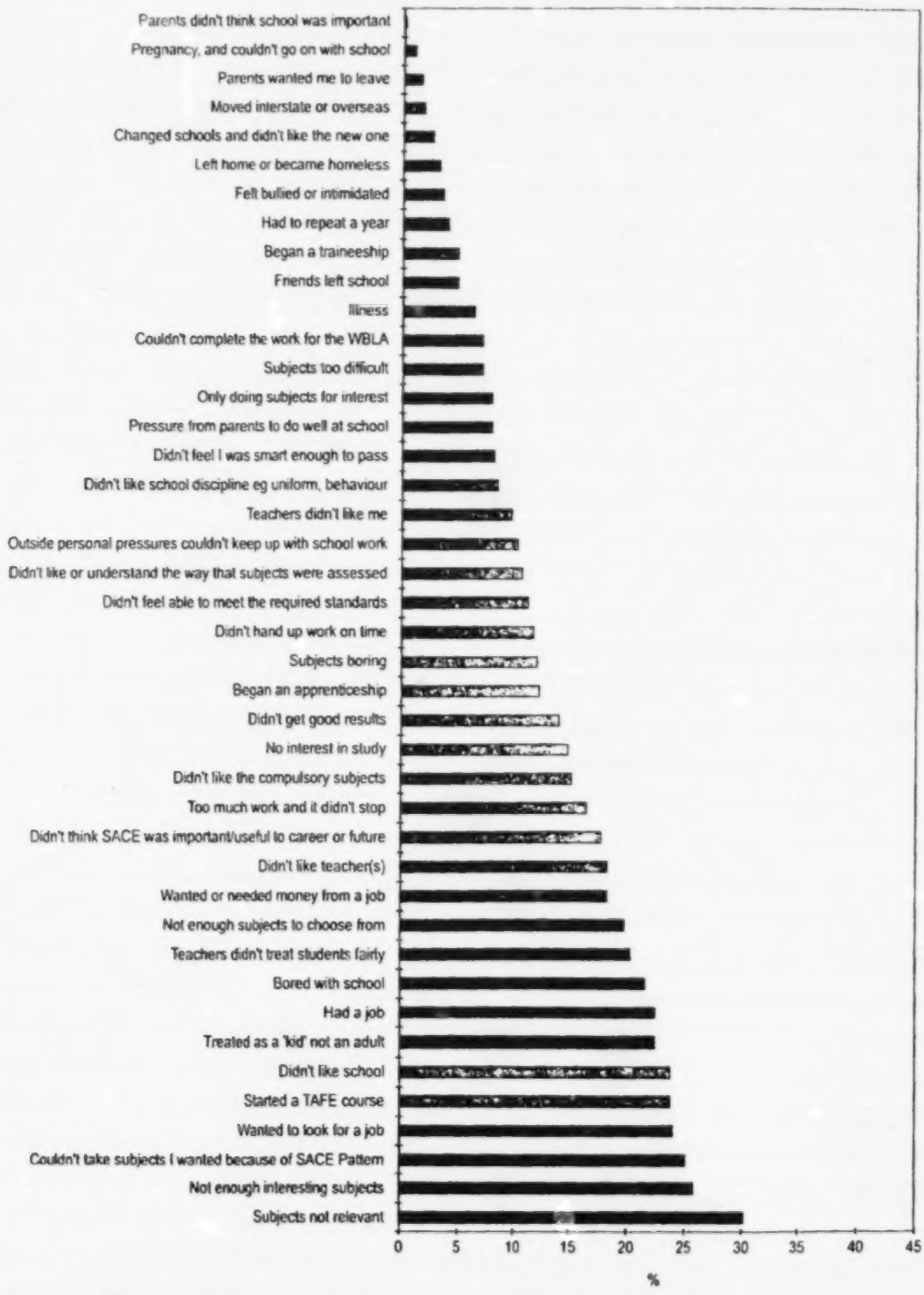
Parents didn't think school was important
Pregnancy, and couldn't go on with school
Parents wanted me to leave
Moved interstate or overseas
Changed schools and didn't like the new one
Left home or became homeless
Felt bullied or intimidated
Had to repeat a year
Began a traineeship
Friends left school
Illness
Couldn't complete the work for the WBLA
Subjects too difficult
Only doing subjects for interest
Pressure from parents to do well at school
Didn't feel I was smart enough to pass
Didn't like school discipline eg uniform, behaviour
Teachers didn't like me
Outside personal pressures couldn't keep up with school work
Didn't like or understand the way that subjects were assessed
Didn't feel able to meet the required standards
Didn't hand up work on time
Subjects boring
Began an apprenticeship
Didn't get good results
No interest in study
Didn't like the compulsory subjects
Too much work and it didn't stop
Didn't think SACE was important/useful to career or future
Didn't like teacher(s)
Wanted or needed money from a job
Not enough subjects to choose from
Teachers didn't treat students fairly
Bored with school
Had a job
Treated as a 'kid' not an adult
Didn't like school
Started a TAFE course
Wanted to look for a job
Couldn't take subjects I wanted because of SACE Pattern
Not enough interesting subjects
Subjects not relevant
0
5
10
15
20
25
30
35
40
45
%

Figure 3: Students' reasons for leaving school (SSSABSA July 1997, p. 95)

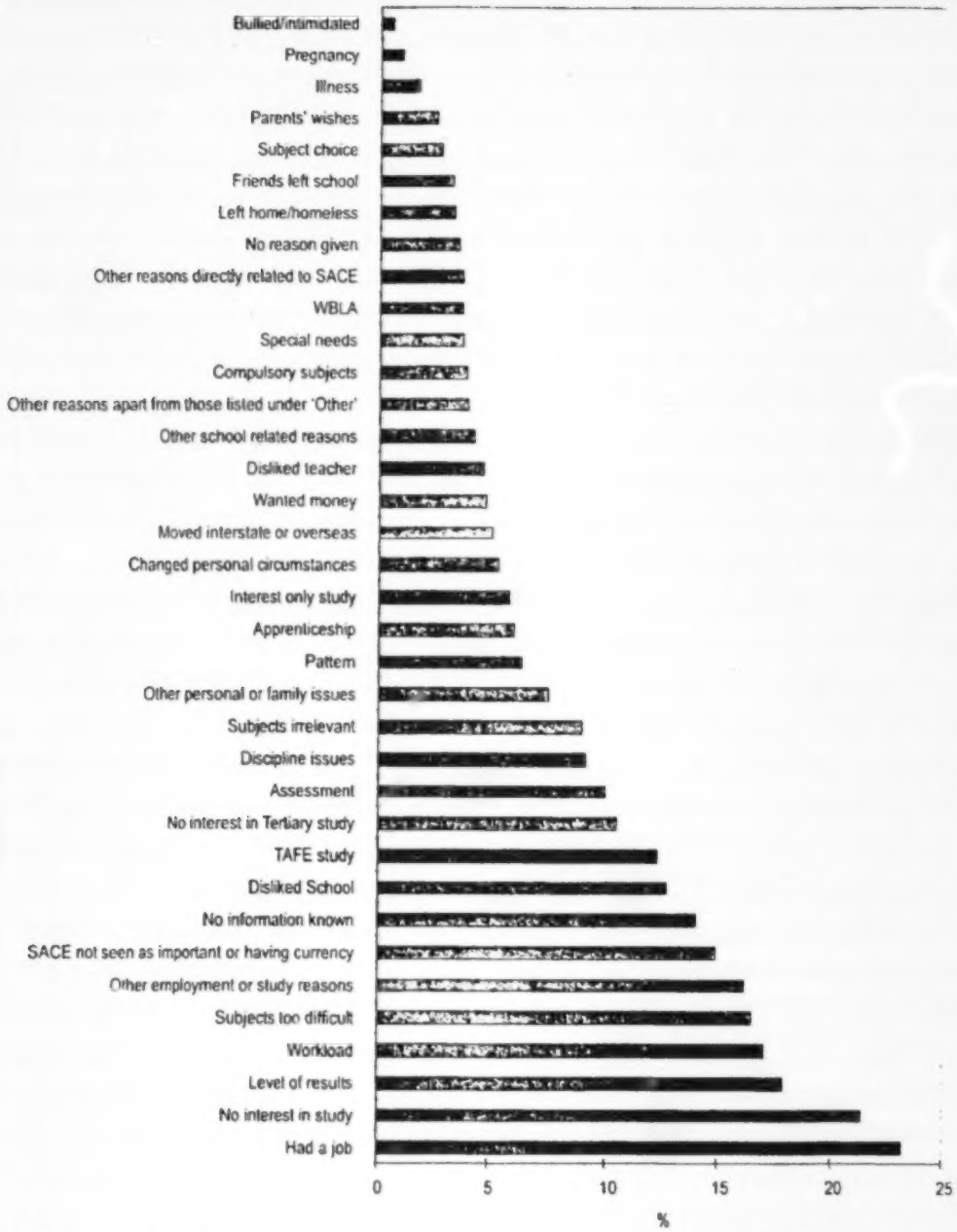

Figure 4: Response of school staff outlining students' reasons for leaving early (SSABSA July 1997, p. 89)

The authors of the SSABSA study comment:

One of the strongest messages was that students in senior schools should be treated with respect and as adults and people, not as children; their opinions should be valued; they should be given more freedom, they are not small children straight from kindy! As one student remarked, Just teachers need to change. They act as if they have

so much authority. Teachers should know how to relate to students in our age group. Some teachers make you feel like dirt. (SSABSA:1999, p. 108)

Our study produced the same responses.

- Most boys don't value school; it's more about getting credentials than learning, and these don't operate usefully as short term motives. Apart from the social life, school for most boys is considered to be an unwanted means to an end that starts out being too distant and becomes increasingly unachievable.
- School work is boring, repetitive and irrelevant.

This was a repeated lament.

> *You don't really learn that well if you can't concentrate because you're bored.* (Year 9)
>
> *Teachers should do more things to make it interesting. They could do creative things instead of just sitting down filling in things on a work sheet kind of stuff.* (Year 9)
>
> *It's the same for all lessons pretty much.* (Year 9)
>
> *We do real easy stuff ... we've done it all before ... it's heaps boring; it's all theory ... stuff you can't use.* (Year 9)
>
> *I think school is too repetitive. Like in English you do the same things over and over again. We watch a movie and then go and do a review about it, then we read a book and do a review about it. That's what I get sick of doing ...* (Year 9)
>
> *We've been doing that since Year 8 and 9 and 10 ...* (Year 11)
>
> *I find that Year 11, (and 12 I've been told) ... that it's pointless, because you don't learn anything. They just get you to do assignments. You don't learn anything at all ... When you do assignments, you don't really care what you do, you just write it down so you can finish it ...* (Year 9-11)
>
> *You only copy out of books or from other people, so you're not learning anything ..* (Year 9-11)
>
> *And in maths it's just sheets* [work sheets] ... (Year 9)

- School doesn't offer the courses that most boys want to do; largely courses and coursework that *'get you ready for a job'*.

This further compounds the paradoxical dilemma of education for boys, namely, that they have to stay in a place that they believe they can't stay in, doing work that they believe is of no value, in order to get qualifications that they believe do not accurately measure their ability, but which they will need if they are to get the chance to demonstrate their real ability to learn 'on the job'.

There is a real issue about education and credentialism which needs disentangling here. The dominant rhetoric in the outside world is about credentials and jobs, in schools it is about education and learning. Not surprisingly many students take an instrumentalist view of their time in schools, focussing on credentials rather than being involved in learning. This presents a dilemma for many teachers - it is not insoluble but it is frequently seen to be a student problem, rather than an opportunity to engage in an understanding of different points of view.

- School pushes boys into a downward spiral of disaffection, resistance, resentment, anger and retaliation that, for many, is just too hard to stop.

The response from the boys to each of these is similar, namely disaffection, making resistance seem necessary, which compounds the problem, leading to resentment, anger and retaliation. The display of their response seems to be all that differs from boy to boy. For a few it is a minor irritation that is easily dealt with through compliance, but for many, the compulsion to respond, directly or indirectly, becomes an obstacle to achievement:

> *We get them back and muck up with teachers that don't respect us.* (Year 9)

Objective despair logically follows from the boys' experience in education and they show very little interest in denying the logic that makes it necessary. Indeed, they seem to be determined to follow this logic at any cost. Hence, too often the spiral of disaffection is a process that they consider necessary:

> *You can't just sit there. You got to fight back, muck up, or somethin'. What else can you do?* (Year 9)

Despite the immediate satisfaction of being heard by way of causing disruption, the spiral of disaffection, resentment and anger is not considered by the boys to be a response that is likely to achieve a great deal. It appears to be a last resort, and perhaps a cry for help or a response driven by despair; not only the more familiar subjective 'feelings' of despair, but a rational, objective despair.

- **School presents too many contradictions and too many debilitating paradoxes,**

  like, one of my mates had, like, a beard, and he's been told off by the teacher, and it's an expectation of the school to shave it off ... It was a clean shaved beard ... It didn't have this morning's corn flakes in it or anything ... It looked good and they told him to go away. (Year 11)

  We get caned [not physically] for having facial hair at school, these days.

  Teachers are allowed to have facial hair. But the thing is the feeling there ...Teachers should have to live by the same expectations as us.

  School pushes the rhetoric of education (e.g., fairness, justice, respect, flexibility, the celebration of difference, etc.) but produces the opposite in practice.

Much attention is currently being paid to bullying and rightly so, but before we are horrified by bullying between students, we need to ensure that we are not supporting institutional bullying. While in schools, I have heard staff tell kids they are stupid, jocularly put them down, shout at them and use authority as a weapon. If students respond in a similar fashion, they are rude and are generally 'disciplined'. Even the use of the word often reflects assumptions about the nature of interactions in schools. I have some doubts about the system of prefects and what it implies, but schools must of course organise themselves as they see in their best interests and to be sensitive to community requirements. Research shows that school bullying is much less likely to take place in schools where the internal culture does not portray or reflect a hierarchical, bullying structure and where all students are respected and not belittled.

Significantly, stereotypes, false dichotomies and similar culturally archival concepts, are at their most destructive in information technology, where most traditional distinctions become fuzzy. The boys, for example, fail to understand why computer games and the use of email are excluded from their academic program, why teachers spend so much time *"trying to block internet sites"* that are easily accessed from home, why teachers don't understand computers much, why they *"force students to learn what they already know*, and why teachers and librarians stand guard over computers that have already passed their use by date.

Boys who talked about their ability to *"build computers"* and who have been *"programming for five years"*, or who have found ways of *"getting into blocked sites"* and so on, also talked about their frustration at being forced to do boring, menial tasks in the classroom like *"opening and closing files"* and how their resistance had led to 'withdrawal' from computing classes and, in one case, a three day suspension. They also talked of being excluded from computing facilities because they refused to take their hats off, or because they 'used' email or loaded 'games' onto school computers. In the Survey of Student Views, 76 per cent of boys agreed with the statement that 'Teachers don't know much about computers and they won't let you tell them.'

School is about preparing you for adult life, but adult life gets in the way of school; culturally celebrated achievements and rites of passage into adult life (e.g. participation in competitive sport, getting a driver's license, owning a car, getting part time work, providing for their own needs, helping to run a household, as well as establishing an adult identity, social life and sexual relationships) are negative influences on school achievement and on the preparedness of boys to stay at school.

For most boys, school is focused on preserving the status-quo, which makes it culturally out of date and paradigmatically inflexible. It remains detached from the real world, distant from the rest of their lives, and neither convincingly forward looking, nor plausibly concerned with the need to prepare students for a place within the emerging society.

From what the boys are saying, they would regard the apparent lack of confidence on the part of teachers more as a lack of interest. They believe that many initiatives fail because there are *"too many bad teachers"*, who *"don't ask"*, *"don't listen"*, *"don't care"* and who are not culturally 'up to date'. They also believe that there are too many *"old"* teachers. Although old teachers are not necessarily bad teachers because they are old, there is a strong view that the prevalence of older teachers accounts for the lack of interest in new ideas and their cynicism about the value of established ideas and strategies. (Trent & Slade, 2001)

The boys are however quite clear about what constitutes good teaching, how important it is and that they can recognise it. They find it hard to understand why if some teachers can do it, others can't.

The participants in this study have been clear, constructive and detailed in defining the constituting features of good teaching from their perspective; providing more than 60 defining features of a 'good teacher'. Interestingly, their emphasis is always placed on the skills of teachers; their ability and willingness to establish relationships of mutual respect and friendship with their students.

A good teacher is one who:

- listens to what you have to say;
- respects you as a person; treats you like a friend; treats you as an adult;
- is relaxed, enjoys their day, and is able to laugh, especially at mistakes;
- is flexible, adjusting rules and expectations to meet the needs of individuals and particular circumstances;
- explains the work; makes the work interesting; finds interesting things to do;
- doesn't humiliate you in front of the class; doesn't try to destroy you so that you'll leave school, or tell you you're no good and that you should leave school;
- doesn't write slabs of work on the board to be copied;
- lets you talk and move about in the classroom;
- doesn't favour girls, or the boys who do what they're told;
- doesn't keep picking on people who have a reputation, pushing them to retaliate;
- doesn't mark you down because of your behaviour; and
- gives you a chance to muck up and learn from it.

From their remarks about good teachers, the boys are identifying teachers who go beyond the 'policies and aims' of education and its contemporary rhetoric about thinking in terms of interdependence and relativity. Essentially, they are describing teachers who, professionally and personally, are taking risks by listening, responding, respecting, trusting and valuing their students more than the rules, the policies, the legal precedents, their training, careers, the reputation of the school, and in some cases, small but vocal groups of parents:

> *Good teachers are flexible with your behaviour. You can joke in class. We drop a couple of words ... we shouldn't, but he doesn't give detentions. He breaks the rules of the school but he doesn't break his own. He's nice to you so you abide by him, we've got respect for him.* (Year 11)

Ironically, the kind of non-compliance that characterises these teachers seems to make them more successful at teaching and more valued as positive role models and often mentors:

> *Whatever they do, is what we do. If they're a good teacher and they do better stuff, we do better stuff. If they are a crappy teacher, we do bad stuff.* (Year 9)
>
> *They be good to you, you be good to them ... that's it.* (Year 9-11)
>
> *... they are not completely strict ... no one really talks a lot and there is not a lot of telling off in the class ... Everybody seems to have respect for everyone else and there is not a lot of mucking around.* (Year 11)
>
> *We'll get further with teachers like that ... we're motivated to work if the teacher's relaxed. It makes it fun. We want to work.* (Year 9)
>
> *If the teacher's relaxed we're going to achieve more because we want to achieve more.* (Year 9)

Despite the broad and complex association of factors, the boys consistently and emphatically see their retention and achievement problems primarily in terms of their relationship with teachers and what they see to be a proliferation of 'bad' teachers who are given too much power. A uniformly repeated view is that a 'good' teacher changes everything. One good teacher, alone, is enough to make a bad lot tolerable and achievement, in an otherwise repressive, oppressive environment, seem possible.

However, it is clear in the boys' responses that 'the teacher' symbolises the system and the culture of the school.

It is therefore an important consideration, whether the culture of the school relates to the culture of the rest of their lives. I would submit that currently the culture of the school is further removed from the culture of the wider Australian society than it has ever been in our history.

Culture of school and the wider world

The traditional debates about schooling have been between the positions of schooling as a transmitter of culture and a leader of new ideas. I would submit that for many of the boys the school transmits a culture which has little changed in 40 years, in classrooms which apart from the new carpet and some computers look as they did in the 1950s, with learning being conducted as their parents might have found it. Education of the 70s and 80s did work for many of us as our influence in the current society attests.

We are a better educated nation than we have ever been before - the majority of illiteracy which is used as a figure in the papers or by the current Federal Minister to make us feel guilty occurs in those above 55. This is true for all groups in Australia, including Indigenous Australians. The ACER data show that Australian 14 year olds are achieving well above the international average in mathematics and science, with 19% of Australian students being in the top 10% in the world. More of us complete tertiary education than ever before and our young are far more globally and politically aware than we were at their age. They may, of course, choose both to reject using that knowledge and to resent its intrusion into their lives, but nonetheless they are playing out their lives in a world far different from the one in which most of us in this room grew up. They are the 'Aliens in the Classroom' but not cultural aliens in the wider world.

Let me illustrate by quoting from a handout at Macquarie University about their first year students. Students in schools of course are even more separated from some of the things we take for granted.

"The people who are in year 12 in 2001 were born in 1983. For them, there has been only one Pope. They were 11 when the Soviet Union broke apart and do not remember the Cold War. They have never feared a nuclear war. They are too young to remember the space shuttle blowing up.

Tianamen Square means nothing to them.

Bottle caps have always been screw off and plastic. Atari predates them, as do vinyl albums. The expression "you sound like a broken record "means nothing to them. They have never owned a record player. They have likely never played Pac Man. They may have never heard of an 8 track. The Compact Disc was introduced when they were 1 year old. As far as they know, stamps have always cost about 45 cents.

They have always had an answering machine. Most have never seen a TV set with only 4 channels, nor have they seen a black-and-white TV. They have always had cable. There have always been VCRs, but they have no idea what BETA is.

They cannot fathom not having a remote control. They were born the year that Walkmans were introduced by Sony.

Roller-skating has always meant inline for them. Brian Henderson has always read the Channel Nine news. They have no idea when or why flares were cool. Popcorn has always been cooked in the microwave. They never took a swim and thought about Jaws. The Vietnam War is as ancient history to them as WWI, WWII and the Boer War. They have no idea that Americans were ever held hostage in Iran.

They can't imagine what hard contact lenses are. They do not care who shot J. R. and have no idea who J. R. is. The Titanic was found? They thought we always knew where it was. Michael Jackson has always been

white. McDonalds never came in styrofoam containers. They don't have a clue how to use a typewriter." (Macquarie University, 2000)

But that is only one part of it all. Probably more importantly, they are faced with more choices earlier and earlier in their lives. It seems from some recent research that they learn differently, are far more visual, learn chaotically rather than linearly, live better with dichotomies, and they certainly have access to information and opinion in ways which are beyond most of our ability to imagine. We talk of the impact of information technology on our and their lives, but outside of school they live it. The nature of communication, of work patterns, of conceptions of time and space, of friendships and interactions are all quite different from how we organise and structure learning and interaction in schools.

At schools where the Information Technology teachers are regarded as 'good teachers' the state of the facilities, the speed of the modem, and so on, are not the major issue. In one school, the boys described the 'Info Tech' teacher as *"a legend"* largely because *"he listens"*, *"he treats you like a friend"*, *"he takes you seriously"*, and he *"lets you do stuff"* . From much of what was said, it is evident that this particular teacher has understood that computing is not just a new technology, it is also a new way of life, involving new dimensions of space and time, new expectations and a virtual world in which distinctions between reality and fantasy collapse, and notions like 'distance', 'tomorrow', 'limits', 'restrictions, 'blocked sites' and even 'copyright' make very little sense.

We need to recognise that these 'aliens in the classroom' are growing up in a different and technological world. Instead of trying to confine or manage that world, it is imperative in my view that schools focus on helping them to choose wisely, to understand consequences by reasoning them through, to differentiate between the wealth of inputs. This means that the roles of schools and teachers are not those of knowledge givers, in the main, or of knowledge organisers as they have been in the past but they must be guiders, mentors, and problem solvers.

It is not a sensible use of our time to try to confine the Net or to say technology can only be used in this or that way, for this or that purpose because its very existence and

design is based on chaos and uncontrollability. We have a unique opportunity to shape how they use what they glean, by accepting the nature of the technology and learning about its use from them in exchange for their learning about how to make judgments about its worth, and how to resolve the dichotomies it presents.

The separation of schooling from the rest of life is, for me, one of the big issues facing us. I do not think that ever before have we had such a gap between the life of students inside and outside school. We exhort older students to behave 'like adults'- a somewhat ill-defined concept and we treat them like children. From year 10 on, up to 80% of them are working up to 20 hours a week and we do not accept or value that. In the meantime, we talk of getting them work ready. We talk of teaching them to make decisions but we do not allow them to do so, unless they are the decisions we wish them to make. They live in a world where from an early age everyone is on first name terms – the terms Aunt and Uncle are fast disappearing - and we impose a formality that exists nowhere else except perhaps in the army.
Given the current push to change the culture of the army, perhaps it is not the best model to follow.

> *The people who've got control are the one's who have to change; have to give up being control freaks, seein' everythin' the way they want to ... Anyway, the ones who do well at school are the ones who are like the teachers. In twenty years they'll be running the schools and nothin' will have changed - except most of 'em'll be women. But that's no big difference. A control freak's a control freak. Men or women, doesn't matter.*

In my view, there are some areas in which schools should oppose rather than transmit some aspects of the culture. One of these is in the area of bullying - because there is bullying in the wider world - workplace bullying, bullying in the armed services, bullying among some in the churches, bullying in the name of discipline does not mean that the culture of the school should reflect or endorse it. There are other examples which I am sure you can identify.

So what does this mean for teacher education?

I consider that there are huge challenges for teacher education, at both pre- and post-service level. Teacher educators need to understand the larger cultural issues and the nature of the learning which is occurring, particularly when it is part of the 'hidden curriculum'. There is a need for universities, as part of teacher education programs, to ensure that graduates have strategies to avoid the abuse of power, that professional development focuses on how to recognise and deal with bullying, violence and despair among students.

We need to marry a focus on discipline and curriculum studies with a genuine ability to be non-judgmental, to listen and to teach our students not only to listen but to hear and to give them strategies to understand and shape the cultures of the schools. It is important that students are literate but literacy goes far beyond that in the world of Dr Kemp. Our teacher education students and teachers in the system need the skills to work in critical literacy in all communication modes - we do not need better and better acknowledged, footnoted and non-plagiarised 'crap'.

Most importantly, as educators we need to respect the young. We need to listen to them because if we don't they will not listen to us. We need to reflect on how we structure our world and what messages we send as institutions and as individuals. We need to acknowledge their areas of expertise and expect them to acknowledge ours. We need to ensure that we understand how they measure success, as well as explaining to them what we mean by it. We need to help them to feel proud of who they are, so we can feel proud of who we are and the role we have played in their lives. As they say, a good teacher makes all things tolerable and possible.

We in higher education need to radically rethink much of what we do in the education, not training, of teachers. We need, with the profession, to move together to ensure that politicians and the media recognise the essential role that educators perform and what it would look like if we didn't exist or were not as good at what we do as we are. We need to make the politicians and the media recognise how little we spend on our greatest cultural capital, in comparison with almost every other Western world country and many Asian nations.

We in teacher education need to practise what we preach. We talk of reflective practice but we often do not reflect on the nature of what we are transmitting but spend lots of time on what we are transmitting. We need to be sure we are not exacerbating the 'alienness' by passing on a culture which exists in our heads rather than in their and their students' reality. That means learning to critically evaluate our own performances, knowing that we are not perfect, nor do we have all the answers It is only then that we can pass on to our students the skills to do the same so that they can change the culture of the schools, to the benefit of both the girls and the boys.

Finally, as teacher educators and teachers, there is a great need to take risks, to involve everyone from a very early age in the decisions about their own education. We need to be able to embrace change, rather than resist it as the waves of cultural change of each generation impact on us. Then perhaps the classrooms or cyberspaces of 2010 will cease to be the classroom of the nineteenth century and education will be a leader in society not a separate part or a follower. Classrooms might even no longer be alien landscapes and all of us might see ourselves as learners.

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Adolescent Student Questionnaire DRAFT

Katherine L Dix 20, September 2000

Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐ **Age:** ☐ **Year Level:** ☐

This is a chance to say what you think and how you feel about your educational experiences by responding to a series of statements. The statements have been collected from group discussions with other students of your age. They identify some of the issues and problems faced by these students. We would like to know if your views are different or the same.

It is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. It is important that your answers accurately show how you feel. Your responses are private and will not be shown to your teachers or anyone else.

When you are ready to begin, please read each statement and choose the answer that best describes what you think or feel. Indicate your response by **circling one** of four possible answers:

SD if you **strongly disagree** with the statement
D if you **disagree** with the statement
A if you **agree** with the statement
SA if you **strongly agree** with the statement

If you want to change a response you have circled you should cross out the old answer and circle a new answer on the same line. You should have only one answer for each sentence. Do not leave out or miss any of the sentences. **PLEASE DO NOT TALK** once you have started.

Fairness

1. The student is always wrong, it's never the teacher
2. Teachers won't admit to their own mistakes
3. What teachers want is always right and what the student wants is always wrong
4. If you get into trouble, you never get to say your side of the story
5. Teachers make the rules to suit themselves
6. Girls can cope with the work load because the teachers help them a lot more
7. In sport the boys are expected to do their best, but the girls can muck around
8. The way teachers treat boys and girls differently is a big problem
9. Girls get a better deal at school
10. Girls can get away with more, like changing the colour of their hair. Boys can't.
11. If a girl talks in class nothing happens, but if a boy talks he gets sent out
12. If a boy hasn't finished an assignment he gets a zero, but a girl would get an extension
13. Teachers give more help to the smart students
14. Teachers hold grudges
15. I get a good feeling from making the teacher really pissed off, cause they're doing the same to me
16. A student getting high grades is more likely to get away with stuff
17. Presentation shouldn't be important
18. If something goes wrong boys always get blamed for it
19. If you're not the best they don't care about you

20. Even when I do my work and try my hardest I still don't get the marks I deserve
21. Teachers don't really take time to find out how long it took to do the work and how much effort you put into it
22. Teachers don't even read the essay, they just read the name at the top and give a mark
23. If teachers don't like you, you get a lower mark
24. At school you get punished for stupid things
25. Librarians make their own rules
26. Teachers should look for ways to solve the problems, rather than just punishing kids
27. School should get rid of the kids that just muck around and let the kids that want to be there get where they want to go
28. If you miss some work you should be able to just catch up in your own time, not get told off

Respect for teachers

29. I would have more respect for teachers if I was on a first name basis with them
30. If you don't like the teacher you'll avoid the homework
31. Even though you may not like a subject you still get the work done if the teacher is good
32. I tend to muck around more in class if the teacher is crap
33. If the teacher is good then I usually try harder
34. There are too many bad teachers
35. Teachers swap gossip about kids they don't like
36. Teachers never look at what they're doing to see if they could do it better
37. I don't like teachers so I don't ask questions
38. Teachers that just teach out of the text book don't know the work
39. Younger teachers are usually better cause they are not that different from us
40. The age of a teacher doesn't matter, it's more the sort of person they are and if they can take on new things
41. I hate teachers who hate kids
42. You can't learn to be a good teacher, you need to have the right personality
43. I find it hard to like most adults

Respect from others

44. Teachers make you feel like you're dumb
45. Teachers deliberately humiliate you
46. Teachers think they're better than you
47. There is no point talking to teachers cause they just say you're wrong
48. Teachers tell us to act like adults but they treat us like kids
49. It's harder when you're talking face to face with a teacher because they always belittle you
50. If the teachers found out what I really think, they would use it against me
51. TAFE would be better cause they treat you more like adults
52. Teachers don't understand us cause we do things differently
53. Teachers push you until you snap
54. We are not free to make mistakes and learn from it

Identity

55. It's not cool to be clever
56. Getting paid out for being smart mostly happens in Year 8 and 9
57. Its good to be clever, but you don't have to be a nerd

58. Sometimes you don't do your work because you don't want to be seen as different from your friends
59. Nerds or squares do nothing but school work
60. Being smart has nothing to do with it, some students just get paid out
61. Because of my reputation I get accused of things before anyone else
62. You stuff up once and they think you're bad all the time
63. When a teacher hears bad things about you, they expect you to behave that way

Compliance

64. There is one kind of perfect person and everyone has to be like that
65. The school likes to show off their best students to show us the way we should be
66. It's like the school is trying to put you down if you're not as good as the best students
67. If you get forced to do work you don't want to do it
68. Girls know how to suck up better
69. Girls get better marks cause they're neater, do boarders, and all that stuff
70. Girls don't say what they think because they want to keep a good reputation
71. It's hard not to talk at all in a whole lesson
72. I just don't care about homework
73. Sitting still, not talking and getting the work done in class is not a problem for me
74. Girls like to sit and do the work

Interest

75. It's easier to work hard in subjects you like
76. There's too much theory and not enough practical work
77. You learn a lot more from doing things
78. Teachers should make the work more interesting
79. Teachers make the work boring
80. Using computers makes the work more interesting
81. I get lazy when I don't like what I'm doing

Relevance

82. Most of the stuff we do at school has nothing to do with everyday life
83. You don't need to understand the work because you'll never use it
84. Some subjects aren't hard, they are just not relevant
85. We do the same thing over and over again. It's pointless and so repetitive
86. Teachers repeat themselves because they think you don't understand
87. School work should be related to real jobs

Success

88. You can be successful even if you don't do well at school
89. To be successful in a lot of jobs you don't need school
90. Finishing Year 12 doesn't mean that you will be successful
91. To be successful you've got to have a life
92. Because of the subjects I don't like, I'm not successful at school
93. Getting good marks is not as important as having a life
94. If you don't understand the work, it's because you're slack
95. I am already more successful than my parents because I have done more schooling
96. Kids drop out not because they're scared to fail, they just know they won't succeed

Direction

97. It would be good to spend some time at uni so that we knew what we were aiming for
98. Its not that we don't want to be smart, its just that we can't be bothered
99. The sooner I leave school the better
100. Years 8, 9 and 10 are a waste of time
101. There are not enough goals in Years 8, 9 and 10
102. Years 10, 11 and 12 should be in a separate senior school
103. I come to school because I want to get a good job
104. As you get older your priorities change and getting good marks becomes more important
105. I'd rather be at work, TAFE, or a senior school after Year 9
106. SACE should start in Year 10 to spread the work load and make Year 10 useful (skip if you don't know what SACE is)
107. School is only about getting the marks you need to get a good job, it's not about learning
108. It's not until Year 11 that things start to get serious
109. There is no point in working hard because it doesn't lead to anything
110. I think it would be easier to do Year 12 later on, cause I can't really see a point in doing it now
111. I wouldn't like to come back to school, but I might want to do Year 12 later
112. I was thinking of being a teacher
113. Being organised is not the issue, I just don't value school work

Support

114. I don't feel like there is any real help at school
115. The school doesn't seem like they want to help you in any way
116. School says that they're preparing us for adulthood, what a joke
117. School should care more about education and less controlling your life
118. School doesn't help you get a job
119. At school they don't care if you don't understand what you're doing
120. Friends can often explain the work much better and quicker than the teacher
121. If you don't finish your work, school doesn't give a shit, you just get a zero or marked down
122. As you get older there is more work and less help
123. Teachers don't see how you don't understand stuff
124. Teachers don't like helping you outside of lessons
125. Most teachers are just like robots, they do the work, get paid, go home
126. Most teachers don't care what you think or what you feel
127. Teachers don't really help you, they just put stuff up on the board, they don't explain things properly
128. Teachers should listen more
129. Teachers try to help you if you get in trouble
130. Teachers just mark tests and give them back, they don't discuss them with you

Time commitment/Work Load

131. When you've got heaps of homework you're all stressed and the next day you feel tired and negative
132. The work load is often impossible because assignments come all at once
133. Teachers load up the work deliberately to put you under pressure
134. School work should only be done at school

135. We shouldn't need to have homework on weekends and holidays
136. It's bad enough that we have to put up with the teacher's shit all day but to give us more work for home is just too much
137. Homework means you can't have a life
138. Homework is more important than having a social life after school
139. There are other things in my life that are more important to me than getting the homework done
140. They burn you out to get you ready for Year 12, that's why I'm not going to do it
141. I'm usually too tired to do the homework properly
142. Homework is never my best work
143. Homework gets in the way of family life
144. Because I always leave my work to the last minute it's never the best I can do

Environment

145. It's a lot easier to learn in classes where people don't stuff around
146. TAFE is for people that are dumb
147. It's hard to organise my time cause there's too much to do
148. Group work is good, you still talk to your mates but you get more work done
149. The people I hang around with want to do the work which makes it easier to study
150. Because we waste so much time at school, the teacher makes you take the work home
151. Teachers give too much attention to people that are bad
152. All the library books are all old
153. I don't use the library cause the librarian is too bossy

School

154. School is like a prison
155. School is okay, it just needs to be more relaxed
156. There are good things about school but the bad things outweigh the good
157. The only good thing about school is my social life
158. If I could do home schooling for part of the week, it would solve many of my problems
159. School comes last because I value all the other things I do more
160. Kids are having problems at school cause there are not enough teachers and resources
161. Girls and boys should be divided into separate classes
162. Most boys don't do drugs
163. Drugs are not an issue in boys education
164. I always try to avoid using the toilets at school
165. The school makes too much fuss about cigarettes

Computers

166. If work is written up on computer you get more marks
167. I seem to think more about the work on computer
168. Computers are good because they make your work neater
169. If I do it on computer I put more effort into the presentation
170. We should all have our own laptop computers in school
171. Computers teach me how to spell better than anybody
172. Computers are the way of the future
173. Computers at school are a waste of time because nothing ever works

174. There is no point using computers at school because there are too many restrictions
175. I mostly use computers at home
176. Teachers don't know much about computers and they won't let you tell them

Parents

177. My parents are more up to date than teachers
178. My parents just believe what the teachers say
179. My parents get more worried about detention than I do
180. My parents don't care what the school says about me
181. My parents don't think that school is very important
182. My parents would like me to do well but they don't like me having homework
183. My parents let me run my own life
184. I want to leave school but my parents won't let me
185. I don't get any support from my parents, they don't understand the system
186. My parents think school is too important
187. My parents will even lie to get me out of trouble

About how many hours a week would you spend (leave it blank if you don't do the activity):

Playing sport for the school	☐	Working in a part time job	☐
Playing sport outside of school	☐	Practising a musical instrument	☐
Being tutored	☐	Any other weekly commitments	☐

I'd rather do Year 12 at:

Uni ☐ TAFE ☐ Online ☐ This school ☐ At a senior school campus ☐

Have you been sent out of the classroom during the past week for behaviour reasons? Yes / No

If yes, for about how many hours ☐

List the subjects that you do, then rate them and indicate why

Leave it blank if you don't do the subject. If a subject is not listed, use the blank spaces provided.

	The subject is ...		**Because of the ...**	
	Good	**Bad**	**Work**	**Teacher**
English	5 — 4 — 3 — 2 — 1		5 — 4 — 3 — 2 — 1	
.....	5 — 4 — 3 — 2 — 1		5 — 4 — 3 — 2 — 1	
.....	5 — 4 — 3 — 2 — 1		5 — 4 — 3 — 2 — 1	

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Signature: Colin Boyle

Printed Name: COLIN BOYLAN

Address: P.O Box 588
Wagga Wagga
NSW 2678
AUSTRALIA

Position*: SENIOR LECTURER

Organization: Charles Sturt Uni

Telephone No: +612-6933-2495

Date: 6-11-2002

* Executive Committee, SPERA